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TRANSCRIPTION OF AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT WHITING ON HIS RECOLECTIONS OF LUTHER BURBANK 4/2/1979 – SIDE 2 OF TAPE

I. Interviewer John Hughes and Jane Micheletti RW = Robert Whiting

Tape begins mid sentence.

…….place near Boston, March 7, 1849. He died in Santa Rosa, April 11, 1926.

Now Mr. Burbank, as a young boy, was interested in flowers and growing. It was a natural. He grew up in Massachusetts were he could work, of course the wages were very low. He didn't get ahead very fast. He saved up a little money and moved west ending up in Santa Rosa.

He reached Calif. In 1875 and in 1878 he purchased 4 acres in Santa Rosa on Santa Rosa Avenue. That is were the present gardens are, although one side of the property was sold off and built on. Now it's less than the four acres.

Later Mr. Burbank acquired 14 acres just east of the cemetery that was the experimental farm. That's now were the condo's have been built.

Mr. Burbank's father was of English decent; his mother was of Scotts ancestry. He was Unitarian in belief, which is controversial and outside of the regular thinking.

He developed the Burbank potato and brought the potato with him from the east. So it was developed back there. He made the spineless cactus that was to help feed cattle, but it never got off the ground as such.

I. The spine would come back after several generations.

RW I saw him out there in the garden with a burlap sack rubbing on the leaves of the cactus removing the spines. The small spines came back, not the large ones. He was kind of wiping them off I guess.

I. He spent 16 years working on that, it was one of his longest biggest projects.

RW I seemed that he was devoted to plants and flowers as a boy. He would pick up flowers and look at them. That was his nature. Other boys were out playing ball, he was in reading books about flowers and plants. It was in his system.

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Anyway in 1905 the Carnegie endowment gave Mr. Burbank a $10,000 a year. He built that new home, we always hear that Carnegie furnished the money. So that must have been one years endowment fund. I guess you have pictures of it. They tore it down, it was situated about where the city hall is now.

I. Wasn't there a home that he had over near the Salvation Army? It was torn down. I think Mr. Leggett mentioned it. Another home before where he lives now.

RW The way I see it, it was 1910 and the grant was 1905. The house was across the street from the park. That was were he lived as far as I know. Before he built the new home. It's been torn down. The one that's been torn down was were the city hall is. They realigned the streets, so it's difficult to tell you exactly where it was, unless you had a map.

It was a really nice home. I guess $10,000 in those days would be nice. He wanted the house to be really strong, I guess because it was just after the 1906 earthquake. So he bought three kegs of nails and told the carpenter to use up all of those nails.

He was a close friend of Dr. David Star of Stanford. They were supposed to take over the Sebastopol ranch, that's when Stanford became interested. But they didn't have enough money, they figured that would need a million dollar endowment. It was finalized.

Mr. Burbank was always know for his love of children. There was the Burbank school and then Arbor Day, which was his birthday – April 7th. He would go to the school and entertain the children. Kids would be walking by the gardens. The gardens as you see it today is a showplace designed by Leland Knowl, who is a landscape architect and has to similarity to the gardens as I knew them. Because that was a real functioning garden. It had these glass with four boards around them with paths between each of them. You could reach out and work on the plants by just reach out and touch from all sides. It was laid out with pathways.

I. Did it run more east – west?

RW The property was east of Santa Rosa Avenue, between Charles St. and Tucker St.

I. How old were you when you have your first contact with him?

RW I was going to 8th grade at Burbank School.

I. You would remember him when he came to the school for programs?

RW Yes and of course we would walk by the gardens and see him out there.

I. My mother remembers going to the gardens with the school and singing to Mr. Burbank. She remembers that very vividly. Jean has a photo of her mother dressed up as a poppy, kind of a uniform. Her name was Theresa Treaught(?). They have a picture in the newspaper.

I. When did they change the gardens, from when it's was just roses? I remember just seeing it as that.

RW I must have been in the later 50's. That when it became a state monument. When people come a tourist they believe it was like that when Burbank had, but you can't believe those things because of the restorations.

I. Do you remember any occasions when Burbank would be headed out to Sebastopol, or you'd see him going out Sebastopol Rd? Or aware of his traveling over there?

RW He had a Wilies overland, Wilies night 1916. It smoked quite a bit because of the way the engine was designed.

Now here's a picture of Burbank and the garden, but it just shows cactus. Here's the post office, built in 1909.

I. We met David Burgess Burbank, a nephew of Burbank over in Fallon. His father was a half brother of Luther Burbank. He told us that Burbank showed up on his doorstep one day and he had some potato seeds with him. And he stayed there for awhile. They started planting them there, but they were as good as the Burbank potato, everyone wanted the Burbank potato. We are going to talk to his brother Herbert. They weren't very close.

RW Mrs. Burbank was publicly shy and maybe he was too. But she had a few very close friends and went places together. They were like her family.

I think the Jr. College took care of the garden for some time after he died.

Do you have any other questions you want to fire at me?

Discussion of various buildings and contractors in Santa Rosa including adobe's.

I. Wasn't there an apartment behind the house for students that would come and stay for short times.

RW Wilbur Hall lived there while he was writing a book.

I have this book, Trail Valley Pioneers, and it was co-authored by Edgar F. Howell and Wilbur J. Hall and that was they one who came here and lived with Mr. Burbank.

They had a festival one time and had an outdoor play. I think he wrote that.

Mrs. Burbank asked me to take a photo when I was at the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. There used to be a white magnolia on the corner of the street. That was given to Mr. Burbank by the Emperor of Japan. There was a little sales room where they sold various seeds. Ford took that back to Dearborn where there's 200-300 acres. It's one of the 10 largest museum in the world. They took that home from Lancaster, Mass. and I took a picture of it and I showed it to Mrs. Burbank. She said that's not the home as I realize it. So I guess it was one of those restoration projects. She didn't think it was the original home.

I. Mr. Burbank had a photo of it. It was a little black and white home with some trees around it. And he had a colored photo of it that said it was the Burbank home. It was painted redish color. He said it looked like brick and it wasn't originally brick. But the windows were the same. David Burbank has that photo.

RW How many Burbanks live in there now?

I. Just the two brothers. Herbert lives on 5th street in Petaluma, he actually runs the dairy. He's 70. David Burbank is 75.

RW Reads the phonebook of the Burbank's.

I. Mrs. Burbank had a niece everyone says, that was all the family she had left.

RW He had a sister who lived in Piedmont. She had an unusual home there. Mrs. Burbank asked me if I would like to go down and see it. Her name was Stewart. The niece lives in Sacramento, she is a Stewart. She might be related to Mrs. Burbank's sister. She stayed here after mrs. Burbank had a stroke.

I. Did she ever mention the Bloomfield Ranch? A good size apple orchard.

RW It was never mentioned to me.

I. Can you think of any people in Sebastopol that we should contact. I mentioned. Raymond Miller.

RW Ralph Sturgeon

I. Tom Barlow, Denman is his father. There was Leland. Dr. Gale Farinson married a Barlow, Mrs. Newman was a sister, lives in Piedmont.
END OF TAPE